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## The Register of the Jean Field Committee Records, 1951-1952

### Collection number: MSS 71

Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research

Los Angeles, California

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#### Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Jean Field Committee Records,

**Date (inclusive):** 1951-1952

**Collection number:** MSS 71

**Creator:** Jean Field Committee

**Extent:** 1 folder

**Repository:** Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research

Los Angeles, CA 90044

**Abstract:** These are records from the Jean Field Committee, which was formed in 1951 to aid Jean Field in her child custody appeal case. Field lost custody of her children in 1950 based only on the contents of two letters she wrote criticizing the U.S. government involvement in Korea at the time. She had been awarded sole custody in 1940 when her husband abandoned her and the children. He never had any further contact nor provided financial support up to the time of the custody reversal. The records contain correspondence, fliers and brochures, an account written by Field, a report of a support raising tour conducted by Martin Hall, and receipts of donations made to the committee.

**Language:** English

#### Provenance

Obtained by Library founder, Emil Freed.

#### Access

The collection is available for research only at the Library's facility in Los Angeles. The Library is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Researchers are encouraged to call or email the Library indicating the nature of their research query prior to making a visit.

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### **Preferred Citation**

[Identification of item], Jean Field Committee Records, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles, California.

### **Organizational History**

Jean Field was a single mother, living in Santa Monica, California, who had been raising her two children without any financial support or contact from their father for ten years, when she was declared an unfit mother and denied custody by the Oklahoma courts in 1950. Field had been awarded sole custody of her children by the Oklahoma court at the time of her divorce in 1940 because her husband, Vernon Field, had abandoned his family. The children were visiting their father in Oklahoma for the first time since he had left the family. In response to questions asked during a telephone conversation with her son Jay regarding U.S. involvement in Korea, Field wrote two letters expressing her pacifism and objections to U.S. foreign policy of the time. These letters were the sole basis for the change in parental custody issued by the Oklahoma court. On the belief that the Oklahoma court had no jurisdiction to award custody, Field went to Oklahoma to retrieve her children. Upon returning with them to California she was arrested for kidnapping. The California court recognized the Oklahoma court's decision and returned the children to their father, who took them back to Oklahoma. Field's only recourse was to appeal her case in the Oklahoma courts.

The Jean Field Committee was formed in 1951 to raise awareness of the case on a national basis, and to provide funding for the court appeal. Martin Hall undertook a tour to raise interest in Chicago, Philadelphia and New York. Hall was particularly effective in gathering backing from clergy and psychologists and ACLU chapters in the midwest and east coast. He also sought the support of "influential people in society" in New York. Arthur Miller was scheduled to speak at a fundraiser. Hall's article in the "The Churchman" brought the case to international attention. Individuals from the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe sent funds for the case.

Albert Kahn wrote a pamphlet "The Crime Against Jean Field", detailing the case, which was serialized in The National Guardian in February, 1952. The Committee and other support organizations distributed the pamphlet in the U.S. and abroad.

Leonard Schroeder of the NAACP took an interest in the case and prepared an article for the Yale Law Review, as well as securing support for the case from Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP. Unions also raised funding and support, specifically: the United Electrical Union of Canada, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.

Jean Field felt that the custody case was not instigated by her husband, who had never expressed any interest in his children, but rather by her husband's father, J. Walker Field, who was the Assistant Attorney General of Oklahoma. Disappointed by his feckless son, Field believed the grandfather was particularly interested in his grandson Jay. Both of the paternal grandparents were disturbed by Field's belief in equality between the races and her encouragement of friendship between her children and African American children at their school in California. This objection was also given as testimony against Field in the case.

Herbert B. Hyde was hired to try the case, which was scheduled for hearing in April 1952. But by that time Jay Field was old enough to decide for himself with which of his parents he wanted to live.

### **Scope and Content**

The collection is made up primarily of correspondence of the committee. About half the letters are Pauline Schindler's, the chair of the Committee on National Organization and Individual Contacts. Schindler corresponded with Albert Kahn, Martin Hall, and Leonard Schroeder regarding the Field case. The other correspondence are letters of solidarity to Jean Field and to the Governor of Oklahoma in support of her case. There is a report to the committee from Martin Hall regarding his tour to raise interest and funding for Jean Field, a copy of "The Jean Field Case: as told by Jean Field", informational fliers and brochures produced by the Committee, as well as signed petitions. The receipts of donations to the legal defense display the broad base of individuals in the U.S. and abroad who were moved by the case.

A copy of Albert Kahn's "The Crime Against Jean Field" is in the Library's Pamphlet Collection.